

# **CAMDEN HISTORY**

**Journal of the Camden Historical Society**



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# **CAMDEN HISTORY**

Journal of the Camden Historical Society Inc.  
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## **Meetings**

Meetings are held at 7.00 p.m. on the second Wednesday of the month except in January. They are held in the Museum. Visitors are always welcome.

## **Museum**

The Museum is located at 40 John Street, Camden, phone 4655 3400. It is open Thursday to Sunday 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., except at Christmas. Visits by schools and groups are encouraged. Please contact the Museum to make arrangements. Entry is free.

## **Camden History, Journal of the Camden Historical Society Inc**

The Journal is published in March and September each year. The Editor would be pleased to receive articles broadly covering the history of the Camden district. Correspondence can be sent to the Society's postal address. The views expressed by authors in journal articles are solely those of the authors and not necessarily endorsed by the Camden Historical Society.

## **Donations**

Donations made to the Society are tax deductible. The accredited value of objects donated to the Society are eligible for tax deduction.

**Front Cover: Rene Rem at the Camden Museum (K Cordina 2025)**

**Back Cover: Promotion material for 2025 Unlock Camden History Festival (CC)**

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## **Dabinett family of ‘Green Hill’, Razorback**

### **Kellee Cordina**

In 1854, my 3x great-grandparents, John and Rhoda Dabinett, made the life-changing decision to migrate from England to Australia. Traveling as free settlers with their four young children, they arrived in Sydney on the 20th March 1855, aboard the ship ‘Lord Hungerford’. The ship records incorrectly spelt their surname as Davenett.

Many variations exist in the spelling of Dabinett, such as Dabinet, Dabinete, Dabine, Dabinette, Dabnett and Davenett. In the 1800s, English immigrants arriving in Australia often underwent spelling changes of their surnames, due to a combination of factors including illiteracy, simplification or human error. Many early settlers were illiterate and clerks or registrars wrote down names as they sounded, leading to variations.

In England, John had been employed as a labourer and, for a period, as a carter— skills that would be useful in Australia. John and Rhoda had four children whilst living in White Lackington, Somerset, England. Their eldest daughter, Ann Mary, was born in 1843, followed by Mary Jane born in 1846, John born in 1850 and Emma born in 1853.

After the family’s arrival at Camden in 1855, John and Rhoda welcomed their fifth child on 5th March 1857, a daughter named Prudence. Prudence is my 2x great-grandmother, who in later years would marry Stephen Kelloway Jr.

Settling near Cawdor at the foot of Razorback, John and Rhoda lived on a property named ‘Green Hill’, which they leased from Camden Park Estate. According to the initial 15 year lease agreement, signed on 1st July 1863 between John Dabinett and James and William Macarthur, the original land size was 128 acres. Their land size increased in later years, to 206 acres. Situated at the foot of Razorback ranges, parts of the land were sloping terrain and not well-suited to cultivation. On the farm they kept horses, cattle, pigs and fowls.

Among my family’s extensive collection of photographs, passed down through the generations, are two particularly precious images of the Dabinett family at their property ‘Green Hill’. One captures five family members; John, Rhoda, Emma, Prudence and grandson John McLennan (son of Ann Mary), posing proudly in front of their home, while the other shows the same group standing in their farmyard, surrounded by their livestock. Taken



**L to R: Emma, Rhoda, John Dabinett, John McLennan (Ann Mary's son) and Prudence at their home 'Green Hill', c1873 (K Cordina)**

around 1873, these photos have always amazed me — not only because of their age, but also due to their remarkable clarity. They offer a rare and valuable glimpse into the early pioneering days of the Camden district. The photos, taken by Henry Thomas Lock and bearing the handwritten words 'H T Lock Photo - Camden', have been treasured by my family for over 150 years.

The exact location of the property 'Green Hill' was unknown to my family, and I suppose curiosity got the better of me while writing my current Kelloway book — I felt compelled to find out.

After discussing the Dabinett property with Jo O'Brien, we were able to piece together some key details. With the help of old maps, we managed to identify the property John Dabinett had once leased. To my amazement, one of the historical maps Jo uncovered, actually marked the precise location of the Dabinett home and dairy buildings as they stood in the 1870s. Using Google satellite imagery, we discovered that the remnants of those two original structures still exist — still standing in the very same spot over 150 years later. Not only had we uncovered where the Dabinett family lived, but we'd also



**John and Rhoda Dabinett's farm at the foot of Razorback named 'Green Hill', c1873 (K Cordina)**

found that parts of their original home and dairy still remain on the land. I'm sure you can see where this is heading — I just had to go and see it for myself.

The property is set back 1.4 kilometres off Cawdor Road, nestled at the foot of the Razorback ranges. Back in the 1860s, the farmland stretching between the Dabinett property and Cawdor Road was occupied by four other tenants, all leasing their land from the Camden Park Estate.

As you travel the 1.4 kilometres into the property to reach 'Green Hill', the name immediately makes sense — the property sits proudly atop a lush, elevated green hill. From this vantage point, you're met with a breathtaking view of the land below, where the Matahil Creek gathers into a serene, lake-like pool. It's easy to imagine how this natural water source would have been vital for the Dabinett family and their livestock.

With the original 1873 photograph of the home in hand, I approached the structure. It was immediately clear that the house had been extended and al-



**Front view of Dabinett home taken in August 2025. The same place from which the c1873 photo was taken. Note that half of the verandah has collapsed and part of the front wall has fallen down. Yet the original vertical timbers remain visible on this wall. (K Cordina)**

tered over the years — the changes in shape, size and building materials made that evident. My attention was drawn to a far wall. The timber and features matched those in the photograph I was holding. As I moved closer, I recognised the front wall and verandah, along with the door and window where the Dabinett family had once stood — captured in that very spot in 1873. The original vertical slabs of timber on the front wall are still there. The structure now stands uninhabited and slowly falling into ruin, yet it still remains.

It's difficult to put into words how that moment truly felt — standing at the front door of the home my 3x great-grandfather built in the 1860s. To know that he and his family once walked this very ground was deeply moving. Even more so, imagining my 2x great-grandmother, Prudence, as a child — running across this very property, playing with her siblings. My eyes rested on the weathered old fence they had once built and the worn dirt path winding through the trees — a path they themselves had carved into the landscape.



**This photo is of the front wall and shows the timbers as per c1873 photo and the doorway. (K Cordina)**

As much as being here filled me with joy, there was also a deep sense of heartache — knowing that two of their children had died on this very property. Both had passed away before the family photographs were even taken in 1873.

Sadly, John and Rhoda's second eldest daughter, Mary Jane Dabinett, passed away on 7th December in 1865 aged just 19 years. It was reported that she had a brief illness and by the time medical help arrived, she had already passed away. Her cause of death was assumed to have been attributed to tuberculosis, known at the time as consumption. However, at a young age in England she had received a serious burn and was never expected to live a full and long life. The coroner's inquest into her death, returned a verdict of 'Died by the sudden visitation of God'.



**Side view of the old Dabinett home. The original section is to the right of the photo, as you can see looking to the left, many extensions were added over the years. (K Cordina)**

The Empire Sydney published the following article on Thursday 14th December, 1865:

**“CAMDEN” [FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT] 12TH DECEMBER  
CORONER’S INQUESTS -**

On the following morning another inquest was held at Razorback, on the body of a young woman, named Mary Jane Dabinett, aged nineteen years, who had died on the previous day, after a very brief illness. Deceased was living with her parents, who are settlers, and had been taken suddenly with pain in the side and stomach. Some simple remedies were resorted to, but without affording relief. A medical man was therefore hastily called in, but life was gone before he arrived. From the evidence, it appeared that deceased was of a somewhat consumptive habit, and had at an early age received a serious injury from a burn. Her death, before attaining the age of twenty, had been long before predicted. Mr. Chisholm, who was called to see her, regarded

these causes as sufficient to account for the death, and the jury returned a verdict of - Died by the sudden visitation of God. (Empire 14 December 1865)

Tragedy again struck the family, when John and Rhoda's only son, John Dabinett, passed away on 20th December 1868 aged 18 years and 5 months, reportedly from a drowning at 'Green Hill'. It is unusual to note that no doctor attended following his death. With no inquest into his death, his tragic passing is simply listed on his death certificate as 'bathing in a heated state.' John Dabinett was buried the following day on 21st December at St John's Church of England cemetery in Camden, with Rev. Henry Tingcombe officiating and James Pearson listed as the Undertaker.

In the 1860s, the phrase 'bathing in a heated state' on a death certificate, typically referred to someone who died suddenly or unexpectedly after bathing while overheating, possibly due to exertion, sun exposure or illness. It's an old-fashioned way of describing a sudden death possibly triggered by rapid cooling or shock to the body after becoming too hot. For instance, if someone entered a bath in a physically compromised state (overheated or ill), they might have fainted or seized and drowned. As I glanced back toward the large expanse of water at the base of the hill, I couldn't help but imagine that this was the tragic spot where young John had lost his life.

In later years, around 1907, the last of the Dabinett family left 'Green Hill'. Then, in May 1911, Camden Park Estate subdivided and sold portions of their land at Cawdor, including the 'Green Hill' property. The portion once occupied by the Dabinetts was sold as a 279 acre parcel of land to C.H. Cranfield. After Cranfield's purchase, the property became known as 'Fernleigh', and it was later sold to the Brown family, followed by a succession of other owners.

I'm simply grateful that, to this day, the land has remained largely untouched by extensive development — and that I had the rare opportunity to visit and connect with the rich history our family holds on this land.



**Matahil Creek on the property where the Dabinetts lived (K Cordina)**

# Finding Green Hill

## Jo O'Brien

As you can see from her lovely books, Kellee Cordina and her family have a wonderful family history collection, including photographs, documents, memorabilia, and stories. For her latest book *"The Kelloway Family"*, Kellee was looking for a few additional details on the Dabinett family. When she showed me the beautiful photographs of the Dabinett property, 'Green Hill', said to be in the foothills of Razorback, and asked if I knew exactly where it was, I was determined to see if I could find the location.

The first place I tried was the excellent Camden Historical Society book *"Place Names of the Camden Area"* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2022) which often provides the answer, but in this case the only 'Green Hills' was near The Oaks. Next, I searched through land records at the Historical Land Records Viewer under the name Dabinett and any variations. There was no record of a purchase or sale in the area, indicating it was likely a leased lot from the Macarthurs. The book *"They Worked at Camden Park"* (5<sup>th</sup> edition, 2018) mentioned that John Dabinett had a lease at Cawdor, and *"A Glimpse of Cawdor"* (2000) by John Burge, had helpful information and maps such as the one below.



**Camden Park map from *"A Glimpse of Cawdor"* (p38-39) (John Burge) with Dabinett lot 92 marked.**

The property markings on this map were the leaseholds set up by the Macarthurs, who continued to own the land as a whole. The land marked lot 92 and “Dabinett” was south of the east-west section of Cawdor Road, which was then known as Menangle Road which continued through to what is now Finns Road and leading to Menangle. Located in the foothills of Razorback, the location matched the description that was recorded by Kellee’s family.

The 1891 census (available at Ancestry) confirmed the location of the Dabinett family as residing on the then Menangle Road. Newspaper articles state that in later years the property was owned by C.H. Cranfield (then named ‘Fernleigh’), which is clearly marked on other maps, and further confirmed the location as being correct. A search of the microfilms of the Macarthur papers (available in the CAFHS room), uncovered a copy of the 1863 Dabinett lease, showing the boundaries, size and rent for the original block.



### **Dabinett lease documents (Macarthur family papers on microfilm) (CAFHS)**

Kellee then asked me to check one more thing, relating to the eventual size of the Dabinett property. This sent me down a family history research rabbit hole – as I checked as many maps as I could find, from a number of sources, trying to ascertain the size of the property at different times.

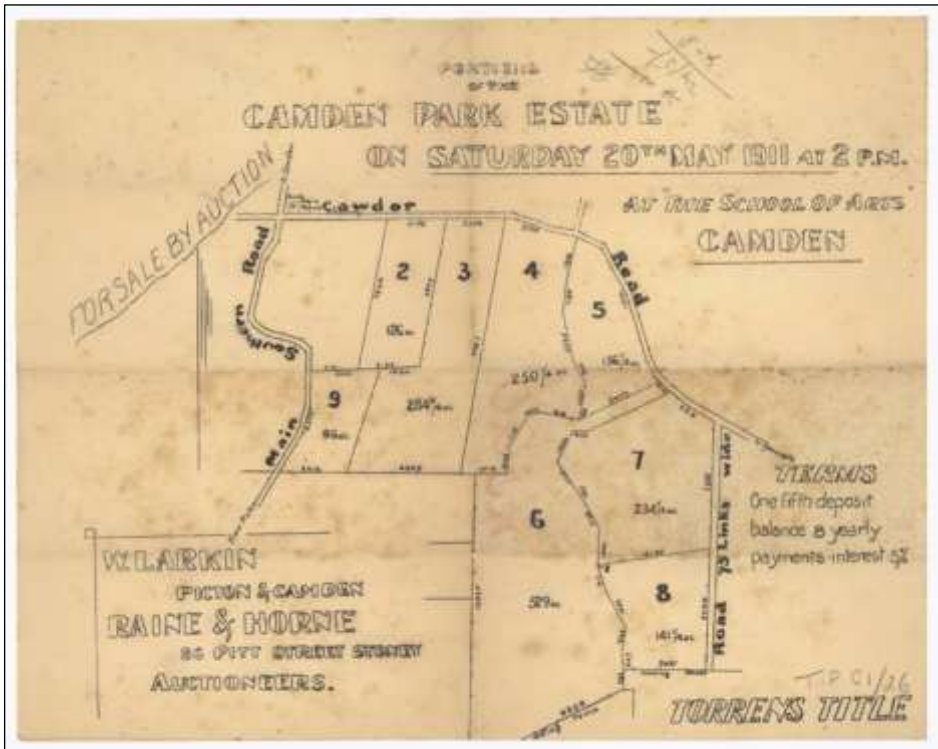
Good sources for maps of this era include the Historical Land Records Viewer, which can be very rewarding, though tricky to search, and the State Li-

brary of NSW, which has various maps from the Macarthur estate, as well as subdivision plans, which can all be scrolled through online.



**Camden Park Estate (State Library of NSW - M Ser 4 000/1 A 3004/ Map 43 (detail))** <https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/74VvzdeeZ3Jd>

One of these maps I found was the original, pencilled and hand coloured map from the Camden Park Estate file, which shows the leased allotments, and is named and numbered as per the “A Glimpse of Cawdor” map.

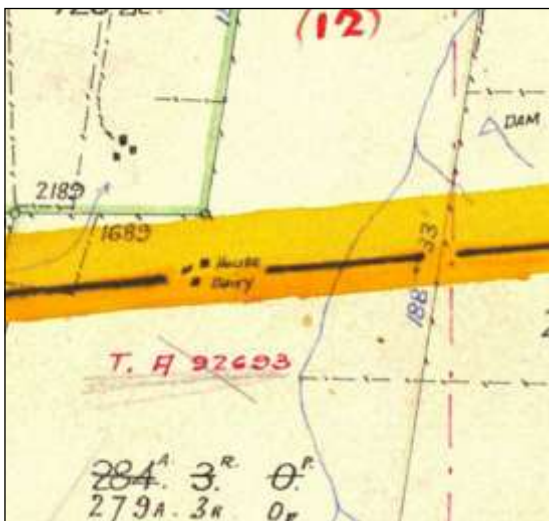


**Camden subdivision plans (State Library of NSW - TP/C1 , Z/TP/C1 – image 21) <https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/74Vvqy6a8343/>**

The Macarthur land in this area was subdivided into its present configuration of lots in 1910, and sold in 1911, after the Dabinett family had gone. Lot 3 includes the properties from lot 92 up to Cawdor Road.

Another map found in the search was a 1910 subdivision plan, DP5995 (available at the Historical Lands Records Viewer), which included the former Dabinett land. This map clearly showed the location of a house and dairy on Lot 3 – the rear part of the lot that became “Fernleigh”, and within the Macarthur lease 92. A current aerial view showed that there were older buildings in this location, and we wondered, could the original Dabinett property still be there?

As you have read in the previous article, Kellee’s visit to the property confirmed these were indeed the original buildings from her family’s 1870s photographs. As she shared the present day photographs with me, I could see it



Part of subdivision plan DP5995 (<https://hlrv.nswlrs.com.au/>)

was still there, the Dabinett's house and dairy, the road, dam, and views, all nestled in the foothills of Razorback. It was a truly joyful moment to see it and know that we had found more than an answer, we had found a surviving



**The area of the old house and dairy, including the dam (Google maps)**

piece of Kellee's family history.

The story of finding Green Hill involved research skills which I use in my family history research, and my interest in the history which is hidden in old maps. These sources often provide valuable clues which can't be found in other places. It was so special to help add something new to Kellee's family history, a small piece of information on one document, which led to such a meaningful discovery. Research can uncover some amazing pieces of information, but it is the power of combining research with family photographs, memorabilia, and memories, which leads to the most powerful stories of our local and family history.

# Camden Air League

## Mason Toy

Out at Camden Airfield, our local squadron, Camden Squadron, meets every Friday night in our Air Activities Centre. We practise drills and earn many badges on the theory of flight, aircraft recognition, and meteorology. These are just a few of the many badges that we can offer. We have a rank structure similar to that of Air Force Cadets.

The Australian Air League started in 1934. Mr George Robey, DCM, was a great war soldier who remained in the CMF (Citizens Military Forces). At the official opening of Parliament House, he bought his son, Keith Robey, a wooden toy aeroplane. This led to George creating the Air Mindedness Development League. In 1935, the first official Squadron, Manly company as it was known, opened on the 17th of January that year.

The Air League accepts cadets from ages 8 to 18; once 18 members leave, they can become officers. Cadet and officer uniforms are pretty different in regard to head dress and overall uniform accoutrements. Uniform care is paramount. In terms of drill and marching, we are again similar to the army and the air force cadets, besides a few technical manoeuvres. A few squadrons are large enough to incorporate a band.

Camden is a smaller squadron. We only have a section (5 cadets) and a flag party (7 cadets). The three flags we use on ceremonial parades are the ANF (Australian National Flag), the Squadron Banner, and the State flag. Having the privilege to bear (hold) these flags on parade is an immense honour among cadets.

Camden Squadron is unique because our home base is the NSW Air Activities Centre, where the league facilitates flight training. We are privileged to be able to parade there every Friday. Cadets can win a myriad of trophies, covering a range of different things from overall behaviour and attendance to having an exemplary amount of time in the air. The NSW Air Activities Centre has its own motto: "Training Tomorrow's Pilots Today"

We take part in Australia Day and Anzac Day parades in Camden. The Air League also offers flight training for our members, and we have the best instructors to help guide them. Camden Squadron has been around since the 1970s, so we are a relatively old squadron by some measures. The Air League motto is 'A Vinculo Terrae' in English. It means 'free from the bonds

of the earth. We are not bound by anything and can achieve flight’.

The league flies Cessna 172 Sky Hawks, Cessna 152, and Piper Warrior PA-28, single-engine aircraft perfect for training. Our instructors teach budding pilots the theoretical and practical aspects of flying, including aircraft walk-arounds, correct procedures, how to use instruments, and how to communicate with Air Traffic Control (ATC). A perk of being an Air League member is that the flights are at a reduced rate compared to other flying schools.



**Squadron insignia (M Toy)**

# 2025 CHS Reports and Incoming Presidential address

## President's Report

### Ian Willis

I am pleased to present the Camden Historical Society's annual report. The society has had a busy and very challenging year. The society continues to contribute to several community roles, including acting as a centre for volunteering, building resilient communities, and supporting local tourism.

### Recognition

Members of the Camden Historical Society have been recognised for service to the community. They include:

Jo O'Brien - 2025 Camden Citizen of the Year

Rene Rem - 2025 Arts and Culture Award

Frances Warner - 2025 Camden Woman of the Year.

Julie Wrigley and Ian Willis received a Community Recognition Statement, awarded by Mrs Sally Quinnell MP at Parliament House in Sydney in May 2025, for the publication of [\*A History of Camden Chinese Market Gardeners 1899-1993\*](#), launched in 2024.

### Advocacy

The society continues to tell the Camden story and support local heritage by contributing to comments on DAs and other developments on public exhibition and speaking at council meetings and local planning panels.

The society continues to be represented on the Camden Council Heritage Advisory Committee by Ian Willis.

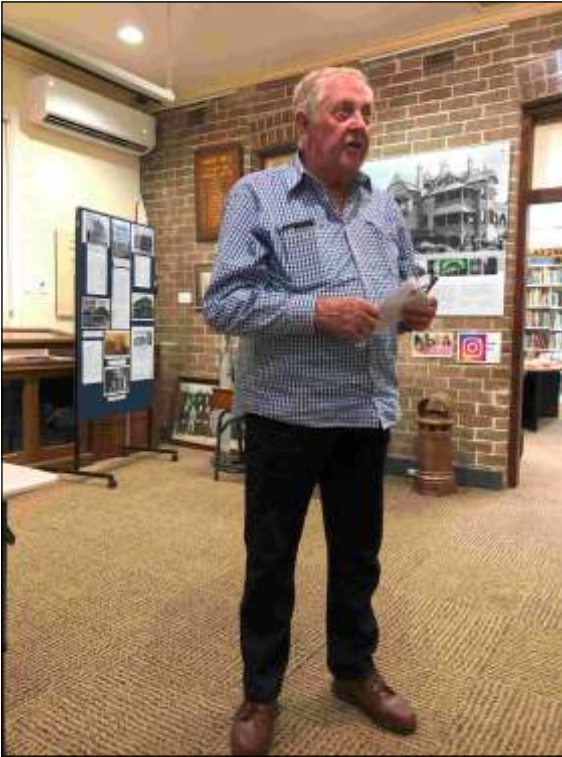
The society has supported local tourism through the Spirit of Camden and Camden Village marketing campaign, including the Uptown District Showcase 2024 at Park Central Sydney, part of the 24-Hour economy promoted by the NSW Government.

Members have contributed to the John Street Improvement consultation process.

### Participation in the community

The society has attended several community events, including:

Camden Show, Unlock Camden, History Week, Australian Heritage Festival, Back-to-Belgenny, Camden Council Volunteer Symposium, Camden Public School 175<sup>th</sup> celebrations, Camden Council Volunteer Thank You Reception,



**David Funnell Speaker  
November 2024 Meeting  
Camden Men's Shed (I  
Willis)**

Write-Out-West Festival giving guided walks, talks and other activities.

The society continues to host Public History Interns from Macquarie University, who produce articles for the Camden History journal.

I have given several talks locally and at Flinders University, James Cook University and the University of Sydney.

Jo O'Brien attended the Powerhouse Regional Stakeholder Forum at the Powerhouse Castle Hill and the Museum of History NSW Volunteer Symposium for Regional and Community-Run Museums at The Mint, Sydney. Jo O'Brien and Rene Rem attended the Camden Council volunteer management course.

### **Speakers at society meetings**

Speakers at monthly meetings have included:

Sept 2024 – History Week – Members -Michael Barry, Frances Warner, Jo O'Brien

October 2024 – Roger Percy – Camden Public Art  
November 2024 - David Funnell – Camden Men’s Shed  
December 2024 – Ian Willis - Local History Trivia Quiz  
February 2025 – Dianne Smith – Growing up at Nattai  
March 2025 - Andrew Allen – Blog The History Buff  
April 2025 – Shane Smith -Dr Crookston House  
May 2025 – Australia Heritage Festival -members – Leonie Jackson, Trish Clark, Dianne Matterson.  
June 2025 - Ian Willis – Camden Cottage Hospital – 1899-1902  
July 2025 – Jo O’Brien – Connections Conference Brisbane  
August 2025 - AGM

### **Volunteers**

Volunteers continue to do a great job in various capacities, including staffing the front desk, conducting research, attending functions, advocating, and other activities.

Volunteer coordinator Rene Rem has managed the front desk roster well. He rounded up new volunteers and solved many issues that crop up. There are currently over 50 volunteers on the roster.

### **Museum**

Last year, the museum attracted over 6,000 visitors, including school visits and community groups. Trish Clark, Kellee Cordina and Rene Rem, assisted by Frances Warner and Lee Stratton, have looked after school visits. This group are now working with the Alan Baker Art Gallery and The Estate Camden (formerly Dr Crookston House). The sales of books continue to produce an additional income stream for the society.

The maintenance of the museum building has been an ongoing issue. The lift was replaced, and dust contamination from the associated works needed remediation by International Conservation Services and closure of the museum for some weeks.

Some roof leaks have been attended to, with much more to be done, particularly in the Nixon Room, which will result in museum closure again.

### **Membership**

Society membership is 125 Individuals and 96 memberships (2024-2025)

### **Administration**

I want to thank Fletcher for his ongoing efforts in managing the society’s financials, auditing book stock levels, managing the membership database and looking after ACNC and NSW Dept of Fair Trading requirements. Fletcher is

ever on the lookout for grants and other sources of income.

Fletcher is the go-to person for advice on IT matters, and he organised a recent replacement of the photocopier. He has been leading the development of a new strategic plan and a new constitution, which will bring us into line with the latest Model Rules for incorporated bodies in NSW, working with museum consultant Margot Jolly, paid for by a grant.

Rene looked after the society's correspondence through ordinary mail and emails, and the museum's general management.

### **Community Partnership**

The society continues partnering with Camden Library and the Camden Area Family History Society. Joint activities have included: Heritage Week in April; History Week in September; and the collection of photographs on Camden Images Past and Present.



**An attentive audience for a talk presented by Ian Willis at the 2024 History Week Camden festival in the Camden Library (Jo O'Brien)**

The society has signed an MOU with the Council officers after a long period of negotiation. Further negotiations will follow concerning operational matters and the building owner, Camden Council. The museum's occupation of the council-owned building, and the maintenance of the building are ongoing.

### **Communication**

The society publishes a journal twice a year and a newsletter three times a year, edited by me with contributions by many people. The journal is lodged with the National Library and SLNSW, and the newsletter is lodged with the National Library.

The Back Then page of *The District Reporter* has had several contributions from me and others, and is a valuable platform to promote the work of the society. Recently, Dianne Smith has appeared on community radio 2MCR-FM talking about go-karting in Harrington Street, Elderslie.

The society has a strong online presence with its website, Camden History, managed by Warren Sims. Rene Rem looked after the Camden Museum Facebook page, and I look after our presence on the Google business pages, where some visitors have uploaded their photos.

### **Welfare**

Volunteer Janet Stait-Gardner follows up with members with 'get well' messages and an 'expression of sympathy'.

### **Financial assistance**

Camden Council continues to support the society through a yearly subsidy covering insurance, providing two storage units at Narellan, and maintaining the museum.

### **Final Thanks**

In conclusion, I wish to thank everyone on the committee, volunteers and others who have assisted the society over the past year. The society remains in a strong financial position.

## **Financial Report** **Fletcher Joss**

The annual accounts show a surplus for the year of \$6,185. This represents a

2.8% return on assets, which exceeds headline inflation, and matches underlying inflation (2.7-2.8%). This return is not quite enough to maintain the real value of our cash assets, but it exceeds the forecast surplus (\$2,000) and last year's surplus (\$3,269) and appears to be a reasonable result given the recent closures.

## **Incoming President's address**

### **Peter Riordan**

Camden Historical Society's AGM

10 September 2025

I would like to conclude with some brief comments on four somewhat disparate matters, in the hope that the comments will come together at the end. First, reference is made to the concept conceived and developed by Noel Pearson, where he argues that there are three "foundational strands" that form the Australian story: the Ancient Indigenous Heritage, the British Inheritance, and dynamic Multiculturalism. These aspects speak for themselves.



### **Incoming 2025-2026 Camden Historical Society Management Committee (T Clarke)**

Second, a brief history of the Camden Historical Society (acknowledging a 2016 article by Past President John Wrigley). The Society was formed in 1957, and thereafter met in a room in the old Camden High School building for the next 43 years..

The Museum was established in 1970 in a room at the rear of the then Camden School of Arts (now the Camden Library). The project was taken on by Camden Rotary – my father Noel was President and Geoff McAleer was Community Services Director.

In 1980, the upstairs room of the old School of Arts building was added to the Museum. Again, Camden Rotary was involved, the President being Ian Clifton.

In the 1990s, the Museum was tripled in size, with state and local government financial support, together with support from local donors and service clubs. Presidents John Wrigley and Peter Hayward worked with an “enthusiastic committee” and architect Dick Stringer to bring this about. In 2007, the galleria was constructed, creating “a beautifully integrated Library and Heritage Complex”. That was 18 years ago.

The third matter is the objects of the society, as set out in clause 3 of its Constitution. In simple terms, it is to study, promote and preserve interest in the history of the Camden district in particular, and Australia in general.

To achieve this, the society may compile authentic records of Australian history, collect historical items and display them in a museum or other suitable place, arrange speakers to address meetings, publish a journal concerning meetings of the society, publish material of historic interest, and conduct excursions and social functions. It can also carry out other activities as its management committee may decide.

The fourth and final matter is my own personal history. My parents moved to Camden in 1960, when I was just short of 9 years of age. At the time, Camden was a small but prosperous country town, with a population of about 10,000 people. The Hume Highway ran down the main street, where semi-trailers joined with coal trucks coming from the Valley. Dairying and mining were productive industries in the area.

It was very conservative, and Anglo-centric. There were excellent schools in the area. I attended Camden Primary and High Schools. The town was protected, in part, from further development by the surrounding flood plain. I am inclined to consider the almost 240 years since the First fleet in four parts. Working backwards, the period from 1960 is my living experience of

Camden. The previous 60 years takes us back to the Federation period, and is characterised by the automobile and the plane, world wars and authoritarianism.

The 60 years before that starts with the village of Camden being created in 1840, and is symbolised by the wonderful photo of a man in a horse sulky, in the middle of John Street and with St John's Church on the hill in the distance. The last period starts with the First Fleet, the escaped cattle, their re-discovery years later, and the rise of the Macarthur family, with land grants in the Cowpastures.

And before 1788, the First Nations people lived in and occupied these lands for thousands, and thousands, and thousands, of years. Camden is now a very different place. Its population is, most likely, in excess of 140,000, and growing. It is multicultural, and remains a wonderful place to live, raise children, and grow old.



**Members of the Camden Historical Society at the Annual General Meeting on 10 September 2025. (K Riordan)**

The society must reach out to the new inhabitants of the area, and welcome them into the society. The simple fact is that the next 100 and 200 years will soon become part of Camden's Indigenous, British and multicultural history. We have a role and a responsibility of explaining, to Camden's young people in particular, the history of the area, in the hope that the good lessons from the past are acknowledged, and the mistakes are not repeated.

### **Note**

The author was a school captain at Camden High in 1969. During a varied and modest legal career, he was a senior lawyer with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission 1991-2011.

# **Delivering medicine, mail and milk: Camden's Flood Boats**

**Dianne Matterson**

Long before helicopters, high-clearance vehicles and motorised boats, Camden's trusty flood boats serviced the community, delivering medicines, mail, milk and people safely across the swollen Nepean River during repeated floods. Even as early as 1835, Thomas Herbert effected a flood rescue when the convict who was responsible for detaching the removable handrails on the Camden bridge (now the Cowpasture Bridge) got into difficulties in the floodwaters, resulting in him being up to his armpits in the swirling waters. Thomas swam out to the man and was able to get him to the fork of a tree, and then returned to the river bank and went to the Camden police hut near the corner of what is now Hill and Argyle Streets, for additional help. With the waters still rising, the policeman borrowed a canoe made from a hollow tree from some of the Aborigines living at Camden Park, and the convict was brought to safety. This was, perhaps, the first time in Camden's history that a rescue boat was used by white settlers during flooding.[1]

## **Tragedies**

However, not all flood rescues went to plan. In 1857, a man trying to cross floodwaters in Sheathers Lane soon got into difficulties, and hung onto a fence while calling for help. The rescuers tried to get to a boat that was kept in the town, but it had been left on the river bank the previous night and couldn't now be reached due to the height of the water. Several people tried to make a raft, but before one could be constructed, the man disappeared underwater and his body was found nearly a week later, not far from where he had gone under.[2]

In 1869, the fast waters of the flooded river stopped the Campbelltown mail coach at Elderslie and the mail was transferred to a boat for delivery to Camden. In the boat were the mailman, Mr Waterworth, Constables Byrnes and Beck from the Camden Police Station, Messrs Dillon and Newton, and John Lakeman. Part way across the floodwaters, the boat capsized and the passengers and mail were thrown into the 'boiling stream'. Constable Byrnes disappeared immediately, but Messrs Waterworth, Dillon and Newton were able to escape by moving along a nearby fence. Constable Beck's efforts to swim soon exhausted him and he almost drowned, but was saved when a rope was thrown to him from rescuers on the bank. John Lakeman could not swim and clung to a willow tree about 200 yards from land; those on the bank tried various means to help him, including attempting to ride a horse into the waters, but the animal refused to enter the river. Those on the bank managed to get a

rope to John Lakeman after Thomas Cross swam out to him with the rope in his mouth. John Lakeman tied the rope around his waist, but as he was being pulled ashore, the rope snagged on a tree and broke, and weakened from having now been in the water for 1½ hours, he quickly sank.[3]

### **Official Flood Boat**

By May 1889, Camden Council had petitioned the government for an official flood boat. The Colonial Secretary agreed to the request on the condition that a shed was erected in the railway yard to house the boat. The Council did not have the money for this, so the boat was placed under the control of the police. By 1890, the control of the flood boat was being handed from one authority to another, as nobody wanted to assume responsibility for the vessel or its upkeep. The police were refusing to take on the responsibility of the boat while they waited for ‘instructions from their chief’; during the last flood, the Mayor had handed responsibility for the boat to the postal authorities, but by the end of April, responsibility for the flood boat had been transferred to Camden Council.[4]

In 1893, Joseph Pakenham built a shed at the railway station to house the flood boat at a cost of £22/11/6. Three years later, Camden Council employed Messrs Taplin and Brasher as boatmen and charged 6d. for each passenger who wanted to cross the river, while milk cans bound for Sydney, and mail and parcels in both directions were transported free of charge. However, it was a service that operated at a loss, which in 1896 amounted to £0/9/9 per flood.[5] By the final year of the century, both the council and the police were operating a flood boat.

### **Rising Costs**

In 1900, Camden Council wrote to the Chief Secretary’s office asking for assistance to cover the expenses incurred in operating the flood boat. Without this help, the letter asserted that the service that conveyed mail, passengers and parcels across the river during floods, would have to be discontinued. The Chief Secretary replied that the Council had asked for authority over the boat, implying that this control also entailed meeting the costs of its operation. Camden Council countered this by telling the Chief Secretary that the wages of the two boatmen amounted to a total of £1/10/- per day during a flood, a cost that was offset by charging passengers 6d. to cross the river and 3d. to transfer parcels. During the most recent flooding, the boatmen’s wages totalled £4/10/- but the Council’s revenue during the same period was only £1/10/-, requiring the shortfall to be made up out of Council funds. At this stage, the Commissioner of Railways became involved in the matter, suggesting that the railway authority should fund a boat, that, while remaining under railway control, would be made available to the police during floods for the ‘rescue of people or property’.[6] Ultimately, however, the Chief Secretary



**Camden flood boat, 1925 (Camden Museum Archives: 1925 Flood File)**

had the final say, telling the Council that it was not ‘usual’ for the Government to provide assistance to municipalities to cover the working costs of boat services. As the running costs of operating the existing flood boat continued to increase, the Council agreed that Alderman Onslow should meet with the Postmaster General (PMG) regarding the carriage of mail during floods. Alderman Onslow proposed that the latter bear a portion of the costs of transporting the mail across the river on these occasions. Camden Council was asked to send a report to the PMG detailing the costs incurred in the past, [7] but, despite this, the matter went no further... well at least for the time being.

In 1904, the Mayor requested that the Public Works Department (PWD) supply Camden with another flood boat, for use on the western side of the town. The Government agreed to provide Camden Council with an extra flood boat ‘as soon as funds were available’. However, as the water levels dropped after yet another flood later in the year, Alderman Onslow reported to the Council that a boat had washed up at Camden Park, which, it was understood, belonged to the PWD. The Council were offered the boat if they paid for repairs at an estimated cost of £5-£6, but as the police report into the condition of the boat was not favourable, the Council declined the offer and the PWD authorised the police to sell the boat ‘for what they could get’.[8]

Camden Council again approached the PMG, requesting once more that con-

sideration be given to compensating the Council for the cost of transporting the mail across the Nepean River during flooding events. Their submission stated that there were three mail deliveries a day from Campbelltown and two mails were dispatched daily from Camden. This resulted in the flood boat conveying the mail across the floodwaters several times a day, covering a distance of about ½ mile on each occasion. The Council considered this service to be worth about £1/10/- per day, which would equate to a cost of about £4 per annum for the postal authorities. This submission received the approval of the PMG as ‘the conveyance by boat in times of flood ensures the regular transmission of the mails’, although the amount of compensation to be paid (10 shillings) was less than that mentioned in Council’s submission.[9]

### **Another Boat**

When the government offered to supply Camden Council with a flood boat for the western end of the town provided that a shed was provided for storage when the boat was not needed, the Council readily agreed. However, the following month, this offer was complicated when they were informed that the supply of a boat was conditional on a bond for its safe keeping being signed by two residents. The conditions of the bond required that the boat was repainted each year, and it was to be ‘properly’ housed. A failure to adhere to these terms would result in the bond holders paying £20 each, plus £1 in stamp duty. Not surprisingly, nobody came forward to take up the bond, while the Council felt the boat should be provided without any bond attached and planned to communicate with the Government over the matter. After intervention from the local member, Frederick Downes MP, the Government agreed to supply the boat with no bond, while the Council agreed to provide a storage shed and undertake any maintenance.[10]

When it arrived in December 1905, the ‘clinker’ boat was 18’ (5.4m) in length with a flat floor, had a 5’ (1.5m) beam and a 3’ (0.9m) stern, and was constructed from hardwood timber 1½” thick. A ‘clinker’ boat was typically constructed with overlapping boards that ran the length of the boat and were fastened in the early 20th century with copper nails. This method added strength to the hull and allowed for a lighter frame, while giving the boat a greater degree of flexibility without bending too much under the pressure of waves and river currents. Two pairs of 9’ (2.7m) oars were also supplied. The storage shed was provided by Alfred Little.[11]

In April 1906, Sergeant Charles Parker, from Camden Police Station, reported to the Inspector General of Police, that in addition to the flood boat in the custody of the police, Camden Council’s two flood boats, one of which was kept in a shed within the railway grounds and the other in a ‘good secure shed’ at Alfred Little’s premises, were both well cared for and were in a sound condition. His report went on to say that the police boat was in ‘very



**Camden flood boat near Sheathers Lane, 1922 (Camden Images CHS0386)**

good' condition, but required painting – work that could be done by the Camden Police if they were supplied with the paint brushes.[12]

By July 1913, Camden Council wanted to free themselves and individual aldermen from liability should an accident occur while passengers were being carried across the floodwaters in the flood boat. Consequently, from this point onwards, all passengers were asked to sign a form stating that they travelled in the boat at their own risk.[13] By this stage, the discrepancy between flood boat income and expenditure that had caused such disquiet in 1897, had disappeared. Two years later, a Camden Council report recorded that the running costs of the two flood boats were £2/10/- while the revenue from fees was £2/19/, leaving a credit of 9 shillings. Ten shillings was still owing from the PMG for the carriage of mail.[14]

In 1922, Harold Lowe, who was now employed as a Camden Council boatman, asked them to remove a tree near Cowpasture Bridge and to install flood height markings on a post at the site. This would increase the flood boat's safety while negotiating a landing, as the flood height markings would enable the boatmen to determine their clearance over fences that were under-

water.[15]

## **Disaster**

In June 1925, the Nepean River flooded again and with water ‘well over the road’ Percy Peters and his driver, George Thorn, attempted to cross the Cowpasture Bridge with their hearse that was pulled by two horses. They were on their way back from a funeral at Cobbitty, and by the time they reached the bridge, the water was a ‘swirling current of rushing water’. The vehicle reached the main current, which swerved the horses and the hearse towards the downstream side of the bridge. As was the usual practice, the handrails of the bridge had been removed as the waters began to rise, so the risk of being washed over the edge of the bridge was great and there was little hope of making it safely to the other side of the water. People on the Elderslie side of the river tried to help, but it was impossible for the hearse to turn back. Ted Taplin and Harold Lowe launched a boat towards the two men seated in the hearse and with great perseverance, were able to reach the vehicle. By this stage, the front feet of the horses were over the edge of the bridge and on the adjacent railway line. Percy Peters and Harold Lowe were able to release the horses from the harnesses connecting them to the hearse. Both horses were immediately swept into the river. The hearse tipped sideways and disappeared just as Percy Peters and George Thorn were pulled into the boat and delivered safely to the town side of the river. Harold Lowe and Ted Taplin attempted to rescue the horses who, despite being released from the hearse, were still coupled together by the vehicle’s pole. The animals were carried away, being caught by trees on the way, before drowning. Their bodies were later found, still with the harness attached, while the badly damaged hearse was located near the weir. The bravery of Ted Taplin and Harold Lowe was later recognised by the community. Harold Lowe was presented with a wallet of notes and a rose bowl, and Ted Taplin received a gold watch and a clock. Both the rose bowl and the clock were inscribed with the names of each man and continued: ‘...presented by the Residents of Camden district for the Heroic Rescue of Messrs Peters and Thorn, June Flood, Camden 1925.’ Each man was also awarded a certificate acknowledging their bravery on that day. After the presentation, Harold Lowe responded, saying that it must not be forgotten that he and Ted received ‘great assistance’ from Vic Taplin, Dan Currey and Norman Hayden, whose actions in lifting the boat over fences and so on, meant it reached the river in time.[16]

The Railway Department’s Traffic Inspector suggested to Camden Council in 1940, that they move the flood boat shed from its present location near the corner of Edward and Argyle Streets, as it obstructed the engine drivers’ view of the street when leaving the station. He proposed moving it closer to the trucking (cattle) yards. Ultimately, the Council decided to move the shed (now containing both the eastern and western flood boats) from the railway

yard and relocate it at the Council's Works Depot in Oxley Street. When Cleary Brothers offered to move the shed for £15 by lifting it with cranes and trolleys and hauling it intact to its new site, the offer was readily accepted by the Council.[17]

### **Elderslie Flood Boat**

In 1950, a number of Elderslie residents formed the Elderslie Flood Rescue Committee, with the aim of providing a flood boat on the Elderslie side of the river that was suitably equipped for rescue work. Cyril Harris volunteered to maintain the boat as well as provide a shed for its storage when not in use. The anticipated cost of the boat was £35, plus £3 delivery; and in a very short space of time, £82/17/- (including a £10 donation from Camden Council), was raised by the locals. By May 1950, an order for the boat had been placed with Mr Gonsalves from Campbelltown, while the money remaining was set aside for the future maintenance and possible motorisation of the boat. Just a month later, the boat was used to help the Chinese market gardeners to leave their land during yet another flood. The boat also rescued two horses by towing them to safety behind the boat.[18]

Camden Council wrote to the Mercantile Mutual Insurance Company in 1952, requesting information about the cost of insurance cover for operators and members of the public who used the flood boat service. As a result, the Council took out insurance cover of £10,000. Two months later, with the operational costs of the flood boats increasing, Camden Council raised the fare for crossing the river in the flood boat to 5 shillings one way and informed the public that crossings would only be made at the discretion of their boatman, Harold Lowe.[19]

Today, flood rescues and evacuations are undertaken by the Camden branch of the State Emergency Service (SES) in motorised boats that are manned by highly trained volunteers, who have left the days of makeshift rafts, Aboriginal canoes and timber clinker boats far behind. This widely-respected organisation now has a plethora of equipment to aid their work, which, in addition to that carried on board their boats, also includes access to the latest weather data, and wireless and mobile communication with other emergency services and government agencies.

### **Notes**

1. *The Town of Camden*, G. V. Sidman, p. 12
2. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 August 1857
3. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 May 1869. *Sydney Mail*, 15 May 1869
- 4 Camden Museum Archives: Flood file – Letter from Sergeant Charles Parker, dated 28 April 1906. *Evening News*, 29 May 1889; 20 February 1890. *Camden News*, 20 April 1939

5. *The Town of Camden*, G.V. Sidman, p. 38. *Camden News*, 25 June 1896; 3 and 17 June 1897; 12 August 1897
6. *Camden News*, 6 September 1900
7. *Camden News*, 1 and 8 November 1900
8. *The Town of Camden*, G.V. Sidman, pp. 52, 54. *Camden News*, 1 September 1904; 22 December 1904; 27 April 1939; 8 June 1939
9. *Camden News*, 18 August 1904
- 10 *Camden News*, 15 June 1905; 27 July 1905; 7 September 1905
11. Camden Museum Archives: Flood file – copy of records from the NSW State Archives, Ref.#41963.4; Letter from Sergeant Charles Parker, dated 28 April 1906. *The Town of Camden*, G.V. Sidman, p. 54. *Camden News*, 11 January 1906
12. Camden Museum Archives: Flood file – copy of records from the NSW State Archives, Ref.#41963.4
13. *Camden News*, 10 July 1913
14. *Camden News*, 14 January 1915
15. *Camden News*, 10 August 1922
16. *Camden News*, 25 June 1925; 6 August 1925. *The Town of Camden*, G.V. Sidman, p. 75
17. *Camden News*, 14 November 1940; 16 and 23 January 1941
18. *Camden News*, 4, 18 and 25 May 1950; 22 June 1950; 13 July 1950; 23 November 1950
19. *Camden News*, 30 October 1952; 31 December 1952

# **Camden Museum Conservation Cleaning Group**

## **Leonie Jackson and Margaret Wheeler**

About four years ago, Margaret Wheeler initiated the group and provided training.

We watched videos from British and Australian museums on conservation and read reports from museum conservation institutes.

Margaret organised the purchase of the special equipment needed. Then she taught us how to use the special vacuum cleaner with its different suction and filters, and how to use the various brushes and dusting cloths.

Margaret outlined the different guidelines for the cleaning of objects depending on what they are made of, for example, different methods must be used for cleaning glass, ceramics, leather, wood, metal, textiles, paper and photographs.

The Antiques Roadshow has taught us that incorrect cleaning of objects can greatly devalue and damage them.

We learnt of the importance of having the correct lighting, so objects did not fade, and having stable levels of moisture, temperature and humidity. We learnt that dust could absorb moisture, can be gritty and abrasive on objects and that dust attracts and harbours pests.

The special insect traps are checked monthly and changed when necessary. Insects found are recorded for each site, Margaret then analyses this data over time to determine problem areas and if other pest control methods are needed.

The group meets in the museum on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Monday of each month between 1.00 pm and 3.00 pm. If you think you might be able to help, please see Margaret at the end of the meeting.

Also, if you are a volunteer at the museum, you can help preserve our collection. You can give your usual welcome to visitors and then add, 'You are welcome to take as many photos as you like, but please do not touch the exhibits, as we have some things damaged recently.'

Margot Jolly, who is the consultant helping us draft the new constitution and strategic plan, was full of praise for Margaret for not only initiating the preservation cleaning program but also for the way she was managing it.



**Camden Museum Conservation Cleaning Group. L-R Jo Newell, Margaret Wheeler, Dawn Williams, Michael Clark, Trish Clark, Catherine Milne, & Carla Hill. (M Wheeler)**

The group started with Dawn Williams, Kerry Hudson (deceased), Anthea Russo and Margaret Wheeler. Others who helped included Julie Wrigley and Ian Ramsay.

The current members of the group are Dawn Williams, Trish & Michael Clark, Catherine Milne, Carla Hill, Jo Newell, Leonie Jackson and Margaret Wheeler.

On behalf of the Camden Historical Society, we would like to congratulate and thank Margaret and her team.

# First Woman teller at a Camden Bank

## Christine Parkin (nee Chalker)

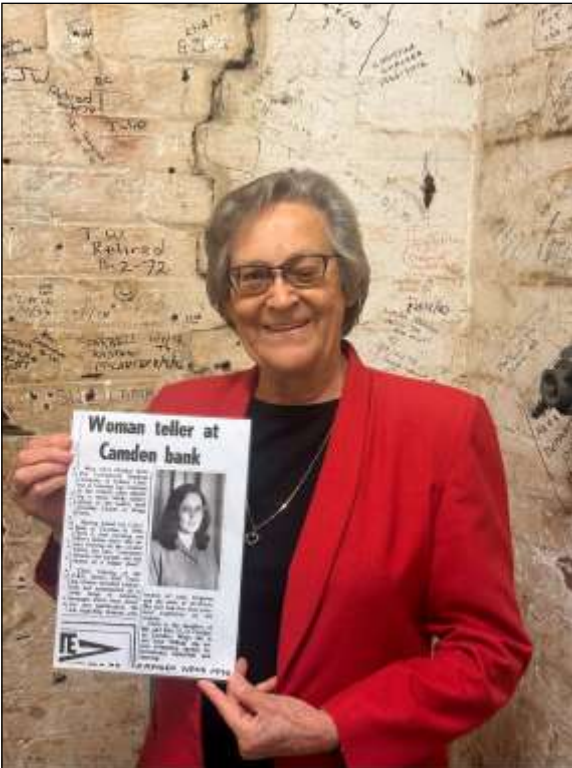
Christine Parkin was the first woman bank teller at any of the banks in Camden and the story made the local press.

The *Camden News* in July 1970 reported:

### Woman teller at Camden bank

“Miss Chris Chalker from The Commercial Banking Company of Sydney Limited at Camden has returned to her branch after attending a three-week tellers’ course at the bank’s Staff Training Centre at Kings Cross.

“Having joined the C.B.C. Bank at Camden in 1966, Chris is now carrying out teller’s duties there. She enjoys working on the counter where, she says, ‘customers become real people, not just names on a ledger sheet’.



**Christine Parkin and the story from the *Camden News* (C Parkin 2025)**



**Christine Chalker and her fellow bank trainees c1970 (C Parkin)**



**Christine Chalker c1970 (C Parkin)**

“Chris’s training at the C.B.C. Bank’s Staff Training Centre included instruction and examination on a wide range of subjects, amongst which were accuracy and specification, the law regarding cheques, protection of cash, forgeries and the use of revolvers. She also had five days practical experience on the counter.

“Chris is the daughter of Mr and Mrs N.O. Chalker of Camden. When she is not busy ‘telling’, she enjoys swimming, squash, international basketball and dancing.”

After high school, Christine started working at the C.B.C. Bank on the corner of Argyle and John Streets, Camden. Her first day of work was 28th February, 1966 (fourteen days after the introduction of decimal currency). Her first task was stamping documents and then she progressed through all the different duties of a bank employee.

**Note**

Christine, her two brothers and her parents, Lillian and Jack Chalker, lived in Oxley Street, Camden. She attended Camden Public School and went on to Camden High, leaving school in 1965.

# Joyce Thorn and her sponge cakes

## Julie Wrigley

I remember the delicious classic Victoria vanilla sponges which Joyce Thorn often brought to supper at the historical society meeting. Her light and airy sponges with fresh cream were the most popular item at supper.

As a newly-wed I tried making a sponge. It was a flop so I rang my mother and said, "My sponge looks like a round wooden breadboard." Mum said, "Make the recipe on the Fielder's Cornflour packet. That recipe is *fool-proof*." I said, "That is the recipe I used."

Seventeen years ago I needed a special cake for a baby shower. Toni Leemen was very kindly holding a gathering at her home in Petersham for our pregnant daughter Katie. This called for some superior cooking. I immediately thought of Joyce Thorn's delicious sponges. I rang Joy and arranged to drive to her house on the morning of the baby shower to pick up a sponge with passionfruit icing and fresh cream. I paid a small amount, which Joy recorded in the fund-raising book she kept on her dining room table, and I drove to Petersham with my trophy,

When someone asked me, "Did *you* make this sponge?" I replied, "I made it *happen!*"

Joyce Thorn received an OAM in 2005 for her service to the community of Camden through a range of welfare, church, historical and craft groups.

## Joy's Sponge

### Ingredients

4 eggs  
1 cup sugar  
1 cup plain flour  
1 heaped teaspoon cornflour  
½ teaspoon carb soda  
1 level teaspoon cream of tartar  
4 tablespoons water  
2 tablespoons margarine

### Method

Beat eggs well – gradually add sugar (in 3 goes). Sift flour, soda, cornflour, cream of tartar together three times. Add to egg mixture folding in. Heat water and margarine until well mixed, as you add keep your bowl revolving

otherwise the liquid will go to the bottom and you won't be able to mix in completely.

Cook middle shelf. I watch from 22 minutes, but cake cooked when it leaves the side of tin.

Temperature 210 degrees gas.

### **Katie Humphries**

Joyce Thorn's commitment to the Cobbitty and Camden community was an example to many. She thought nothing of whipping up a few sponges to give to fund-raising cake stalls. Always remembered you even if she hadn't seen you in years, and an active member of the church in Cobbitty. One of a kind and a lovely lady.

Facebook 25 March 2025

**One example of  
Joyce Thorn's  
sponge cakes  
(Cathey Shepherd  
2025)**



# 2025 Camden Citizen of the Year, Jo O'Brien

## Jo O'Brien

Our family moved to Camden when my eldest son started school in 2003, and I started volunteering as a parent volunteer. Since 2014, I have worked with Dr Deidre Tronson OAM to run the Superior Scientist program at Camden Public School - teaching Stage 3 students science and guiding them in the preparation of projects for the annual Science Expo at the school. I have a Science degree and worked as an analytical chemist.

Based on my long time interest in researching family history, I joined Camden Area Family History Society, was secretary from 2019-2022, and President and Editor since 2022. I joined the Camden Historical Society committee in early 2021, and became Vice-President in 2022. I am also on council's Heritage Advisory Committee, and a member of Friends of Belgenny Farm and Spirit of Camden.

I organise and speak at events and meetings, and prepare displays and publications. I enjoy research, and I write regularly for both Societies' journals. I also lead guided heritage walking tours. I am passionate about Camden's heritage and history, including the preservation and celebration of the heritage heart of Camden, and have been a community advocate since 2018.

It is my goal to help and encourage others: to explore and document their family history; to learn about and appreciate the history and heritage of Camden; and to experience the wonders of science. I have had much support and encouragement from many people for which I am very grateful, and I have enjoyed the friendships and connections I have made. It was a surprise and an honour to be chosen as Camden's 2025 Citizen of the Year.

**Jo O'Brien 2025 Camden  
Citizen of the Year (2025  
Brett Atkins)**



## **Rene Rem, a life well lived**

### **2025 Arts and Culture Award Camden Council**

**Arts and Cultural Award** – a person or group who have made an influential or valuable contribution to the city through any art form, including drama, visual art, music, verse, dance, cultural heritage, expression, literature, film and multimedia.

The annual awards recognise the outstanding efforts of residents who dedicate themselves to making a positive difference in our community.

The Australia Day Awards will also crown Camden’s Citizen of the Year and Young Citizen of the Year, and hand out a Sports Achievement Award, Community Group Award and Arts and Cultural Award.



**Rene Rem receiving award at Camden Council Chambers Oran Park  
with Camden Mayor Ashleigh Cagney (Brett Atkins)**



**Rene Rem with John Wrigley (Julie Wrigley 2013)**

## **Vale Rene Rem**

**Julie Wrigley**

8 August 2025

Members and friends of the Camden Historical Society are in mourning for the loss of our highly esteemed society member, René Rem. Sadly René passed away on 5th August 2025 after complications following surgery at Liverpool Hospital.

René was the popular and hardworking honorary secretary and volunteer coordinator of the society at the Camden Museum. He joined the management committee in 2011 and over the following 14 years he undertook many tasks. In more recent years his work included arranging and hosting coach tours; organising maintenance in liaison with Camden Council, partnership with Camden Library and collaboration with the Alan Baker Art Gallery; arranging school visits; changing Facebook entries with appropriate research; regularly opening and closing the museum; and making a huge contribution to the society by giving generously of his time to the museum. René trained volunteers, organised the volunteer roster and frequently filled in gaps himself. In his working career he had arranged rosters for Sydney

Trains so he had all the skills needed to manage rosters for the museum. He will be very greatly missed by the society.

René had a warm friendly manner. He had the ability to make visitors to the museum feel welcome and usually had them laughing within a few minutes. He remembered people and looked after volunteers and visitors in a very personal way. He loved helping people and was pleased to share his knowledge of items in the museum and the history of the museum.

In January 2025 at Camden Council Australia Day ceremony René was winner of the Arts and Cultural Award recognising his contribution to the Society and the town. René was always happy to represent the Society at Camden art groups and community events including Camden Show. In early 2025 René was chosen by artist Rizwana Ahmad as a suitable subject for a portrait in oils. Rizwana said René was 'extraordinarily kind' in paying several visits as sittings for the portrait.

René was 71 and the society is grieving his loss. He is survived by his sister Monique Hannan, his brother in Holland, his son Craig and his former wife Julie. Deep sympathy is extended to them.

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René's funeral was held at Forest Lawn Leppington, on the 18th of August at 11am. It was well-attended by his family and friends, including the Camden Historical Society committee, Museum volunteers, Camden Library staff, councillors Eva Campbell and Peter McLean, and many others who René had worked with over the years. Moving tributes were read on behalf of the family, as well as a tribute from Camden Historical Society. Floral tributes were sent in memory of René from Camden Library staff, state MP Sally Quinnell, and the Mayor of Camden Cr Ashleigh Cagney, councillors, the General Manager and staff of Camden Council. The flag in Argyle Street was lowered to half-mast on the day of René's funeral as a mark of respect.

Members of our Society has been moved by the kind words of so many - from volunteers, library staff, and community representatives. Their tributes to René feature the words kind, caring, friendly, supportive, helpful, and dedicated. Camden locals are deeply saddened by his passing. He will be very greatly missed by all of us at Camden Historical Society.

## **Camden Mayoral Minute**

SUBJECT: MAYORAL MINUTE - VALE RENE REM

FROM: The Mayor

EDMS #: 25/401197

I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge Camden great, Mr Rene Rem, who sadly passed away last week. Mr Rem was Camden's 2025 Australia Day Arts and Culture Award recipient, the current secretary of the Camden Historical Society and was an active volunteer at the Camden Museum.

Mr Rem was a popular and hardworking member of the historical society. He joined the management committee in 2010 and spent the following 15 years volunteering; managing the roster; running coach tours; conducting school visits; looking after social media; liaising with us here at council; and so much more.

Anyone who knew him would tell you he was warm, friendly and so passionate about history and the Camden area. We are eternally grateful for the time and effort he put into his work here in Camden and for inspiring us. He will be greatly missed.

Our condolences and thoughts are with Mr Rem's family and friends during this difficult time.

### **RECOMMENDED**

That Council note that the flags in Argyle Street, out the front of the Oran Park Administration Building and outside the Camden Visitor Information Centre will be lowered to half-mast on the day of Rene Rem's funeral as a mark of respect, with flowers to also be sent to the funeral on behalf of the Mayor, Councillors and staff.

ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON | 12 August 2025

## **Rizwana Ahmad**

(Extract)

How lucky we were to record this great man, last year just after he was awarded. And how soon he left us!

I am very privileged to have painted him.

And I finish with a prayer for Rene.

May Allah (God Almighty) grant him Paradise!

Email 18 August 2025



**Rene Rem sitting for artist Rizwana Ahmad in her studio as she painted his portrait in early 2025 (I Willis)**

## **Anzac Girls Re-enactment in the Camden area**

### **Fran Rullo and Ian Willis**

The St Patrick's College for Girls History Club has a re-enactment group that takes part in local commemoration ceremonies in and around the local area. The club was formed in 2017, originally from the College Gallipoli Committee formed in 2014.

The students take part in Anzac Day, Remembrance Day and other commemorative events.

The group is led by teacher Fran Musico Rullo.



**St Patricks Girls School Re-enactment Anzac Girls at Carrington for Remembrance Day 2023 (Fran Musico Rullo)**

# The Paperboy and Dr Crookston

## Dianne Smith

An ever resourceful young Camdenite, thirteen year old Alan Rapley had a paper route in the early 1960s. Alan worked for Mr Jim Anast at the Camden News-agency in Argyle Street. The first duty of a paperboy was to arrive around 5.30 a.m. each morning, seven days per week and roll up his newspapers for the morning delivery, securing them with a rubber band. The number of papers would vary daily but was roughly ninety plus according to each customer's requirement on any day of the week.

Some clients may have ordered one paper daily while others required monthly editions of specialist periodicals or weekly magazines as well. The morning papers consisted of *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph*. Weeklies such as the Saturday and Sunday version of *The Herald* and *The Telegraph* were heavy tomes. Added to the weekly paper were the popular publications of magazines for the housewife such as the *Woman's Weekly*, *Woman's Day*, *New Idea* and *Home Journal*. The *Financial Review* also went out to the households of families involved in industry or business in Camden.

Each morning when most of Camden was just waking, Alan would store his cache of deliveries in a wooden box purpose built on the front of his bicycle. He would then head out with a weighty load tossing each consignment over front fences with a well-practised accurate delivery.

His route was up John Street doing both sides as, 'There wasn't much traffic at that time of the morning,' recalled Alan. He remembers the Smarts and Smiths on the left hand side; of course, not everyone got a paper. Dr Crookston was a regular, often receiving several publications giving Alan a decent weight to heave over the fence and the sizable hedge of number 75 John Street.



At the top of the hill, he would turn down Broughton Street to



**Dr Crookston  
(Camden Images)**



**Alan Rapley  
c1960 (D Smith)**



**Front door, 75 John Street Camden (D Smith)**

Murray Street also known as the Hume Highway which was constantly busy as it was the main thoroughfare south. Travelling back to Argyle Street along Murray he then crossed to the other side of Murray Street continuing on the lower side of what then becomes Broughton Street all the way to the Ambulance Station.

A customer of Alan's, Mr Clark lived on the opposite side to the Ambulance Station. Mr Clark was well known for calling on households to collect empty bottles to return for their deposit money, an early dedicated recycler. Alan's route continued along the high side of Broughton Street stopping at Butler's, Taplin's, Mrs Powe's, and his aunt Amy's, (Mrs McEwan), then turned up into Park Street.

Deliveries were made to Milton and Elaine Ray, Eric and Iris Britton; both families lived opposite Macarthur Park. Next stop was back to Broughton and across into Barsden Street, left into Little Street and finally into Little Byrne Street behind the Ambo Station. With his load getting lighter he was then retracing his route to complete any lower homes in Barsden Street arriving at South Argyle Street.

Alan frequently came across an early morning council worker, Toby Taplin sweeping the gutters of Camden's main streets. Toby would be well remembered for the special smell of burning Plane trees leaves that he'd pile up then set alight.

Now about halfway done, Alan then went up Argyle to Oxley Street delivering to homes on both sides before turning into Mitchell Street and proceeding to its intersection with John Street. There were still many family homes in this area which are now occupied by businesses. His journey took him down



**Dr R.M. Crookston's house, 75 John Street Camden (Camden Images)**

John Street to deliver a paper to homes between the Methodist Church and the High School ending at the intersection with Exeter Street, returning to complete both sides of Mitchell Street.

Turning off Mitchell Street into Elizabeth Street he cycled, delivering papers on both sides finishing at Exeter Street again. Into the last part of Exeter opposite Macquarie Grove Road into Edward Street Alan peddled to deliver to both sides and then across Argyle into View Street and along Alpha Road and back.

All this would take approximately 45 minutes. Alan's last duty would be to return to base and unroll any leftover papers. Paperboys would take several extras in the event someone would stop them for a paper on their route. Breakfast would be waiting when he arrived home.

Alan's incentive for working was earning 'thirty bob' or one pound ten shillings per week. This enabled him to buy himself football boots and have money to go to the Elizabeth Street picture theatre.

Dr Crookston's home had a beautiful series of tall front windows on either side of the imposing front entry door. On the left-hand side, one set framed the popular local physician's surgery, which many of his patients would have visited regularly for health check-ups and consultations.



**Robert Campbell at Campbells on Argyle (D Smith 2025)**

Imagine the scene, if you will. Immediately surrounding the doctor's front door were especially crafted glass inclusion panels, which added an element of grandeur to this stately Camden house. The projectile that left Alan's hand connected with one of these narrow glass panes. The rocket-like missile smashed the left-hand one. The crash must have given that household an awful start and a challenging beginning to their usually ordered daily routine.

Oblivious, Alan went on his merry way down Broughton Street continuing along his route. It wasn't until returning to base that he was informed of the outcome.

Imagine a thirteen year old boy having to answer to damaging the much admired home of the widely respected doc-

tor. Alan's 'thirty bob' was a drop in the ocean against the several hundred pounds his boss had to pay to replace the breakage. I suspect he thought he'd be delivering papers for the rest of his life.

A postscript to this story occurred when visiting *Campbells On Argyle* recently. This business now occupies the building that was the Newsagency at the time of Alan's paper deliveries. When chatting with the current owner, Robert Campbell he reminisced about his time later in the 1960s when he too delivered papers throughout Camden. It was Price's Newsagency in 1966. Robert would be up at 5.00a.m. to do his route before starting his day job in Whiteman's Men's Department.



**Campbells on Argyle owned by Robert and Eva Campbell (D Smith 2025)**

No bike for a twenty year old Robert. He drove a Volkswagen Beetle with a cut away door that allowed him to swing his papers across his chest into the appropriate front lawn. Robert recalls regularly aiming for a swinging house sign that was the pride and joy of a local pharmacist, Warren Egghins. Robert had moderate success he admitted.

His modest accomplishment Robert acknowledged, occurred when delivering the Saturday Telegraph to the home located on the corner of Victory and Lerida Avenues. Robert's mis shot penetrated their front window giving Mr and Mrs Chambers their paper to read in bed that morning.

## **Rizwana Ahmad, artist and sculptor**

### **Rizwana Ahmad**

Rizwana Ahmad's practice extends across sculpture, portraiture, landscape and still life painting.

She holds a BA and MA in Fine Art (Distinction) from the University of the Punjab where she was taught by the great South Asian Modernist, Anna Malika Ahmed (1917-1994).

Trained in classical realism, her style has evolved to incorporate Impressionism, Expressionism and semi-abstractation.

She is a specialist in live studio portraiture and en plein air landscapes. She has also learned from the renowned teachers of contemporary Realism, Richard Schmid (1943-2021) and John Howard Sanden (1935-2022).

She, in turn, is dedicated to the teaching and dissemination of techniques stemming from the Realist school. Teaching remains her overriding passion.

Based in Camden since 1973, she is a multiple section Camden Art Prize winner and has been exhibiting as an associate member of the Royal Art Society for almost two decades.

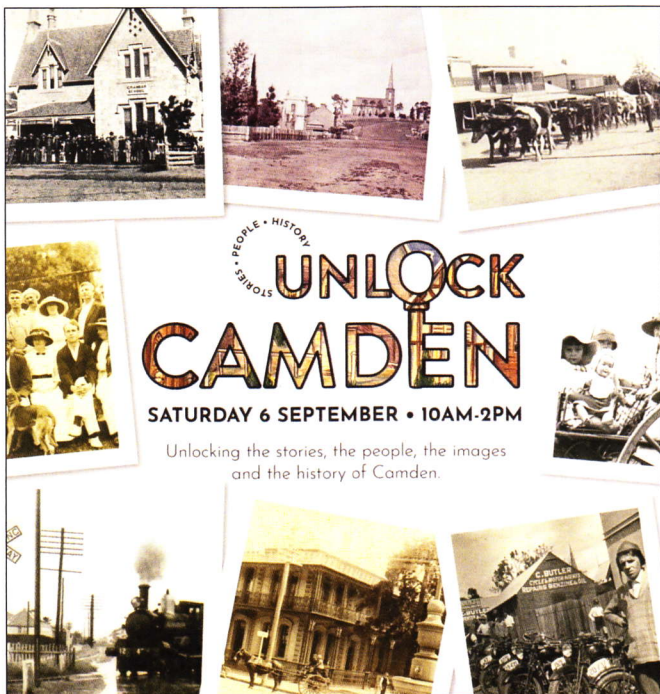
She is also a longstanding member of Portrait Artists Australia, the Liverpool Arts Society, and the Macarthur Art Group.

She has taught privately from her studio for many years as well as through Camden Council programmes.

Having lived for over fifty years in Camden, she has documented the town's people and landscapes through her sculptures and paintings, some of which form part of its permanent collection.



**Rizwana Ahmad undertaking a portrait of Rene Rem outside the Camden Museum during 2024 History Week (I Willis)**



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